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Women in politics: but what about lesbians?

ANGELA BOWEN

Consider that women are 53% of the voting population and that six million more women than men cast ballots last year. Consider also that for the first time in history, women's particular concerns are showing up as patterns in the voting booth.

Six of the eight contenders for the Democratic nomination considered the recent political clout of women and showed up at Emmanuel College on Friday, February 3, at the Women in Politics presidential forum.

This forum marked the first meeting of the candidates to solely relate to national and international issues from a women's perspective. Some of the gender gap issues concerned pay equity, the national budget and human services programs, child care, civil rights enforcement, military spending and foreign policy.

Before an audience of 500, the candidates were soundly questioned by panelists Ellen Goodman (*Boston Globe*), Eileen Shanahan (*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*), and Carole Simpson (*ABC News*). Liz Walker of WBZ-TV was the moderator.

The candidates were as one in their attack on Reagan's policies — everything from federal cutbacks in the programs to feed children and pregnant women (WIC) to nuclear disarmament. Mondale said he would institute "a freeze to control those dreadful weapons," while Jackson said, "The only reason we are alive today is because the Russians decided not to kill us last night," and said he would immediately meet with the Soviet head of state if he were elected. "They too want to live," he stated.

Jackson faltered on one issue — abortion. During one particularly relentless pursuit, Eileen Shanahan pressed him to the wall after general statements he made about sex education, the woman's own responsibility, and self-control. When Shanahan insisted on an answer, he finally stated that he would support federal funds for abortion — which

made the candidates unanimous on that issue.

On foreign policy, McGovern stated that women have better instincts on these issues than men, and that the president ought to appoint women as secretary of state, secretary of defense, and ambassador to the UN.

The candidates were so similar in their beliefs that there were no sparks flying. The great difference was of tone and style. Mondale was his old smooth self, Hart comfortably liberal, Hollings amusing, McGovern toned-down radical, Jackson visionary, Glenn awkward. Jackson seems to be moving rapidly ahead from just a few months ago when he stated in an interview (Nov. '83) in the *New York Times* that black women had no business with the "white, middle-class women's movement." During this forum, however, he urged the women's movement to open up to black and Hispanic women, and women of all classes if they expect to advance the ERA.

Glenn was not questioned by the panel on his refusal to support legislation for gay rights. In his closing remarks, he quoted awkwardly from Elizabeth Cady Stanton: "... she said then and so I say now, 'To men their rights and nothing more, to women their rights and nothing less.'" Although he escaped from the panel, I hoped the issue would be raised from the floor in the half-hour of questioning from the audience. I hoped for something like this:

"Senator Glenn, you say you welcome the changes that are bringing about the use of the brain power of 53% of the population that are women. With at least 10% of the population declared homosexual, this means that there are many hidden lesbians. And yet you would not use the power of the presidency to support legislation that would remove discrimination against them. Are we to assume that you welcome the strength, intelligence and commitment that women could offer — except for lesbian women?"

The question never came. Too bad.